

Traditions and Customs in Community Development: The Case of Nkanu West and Nkanu East Local Government Areas of Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of traditions and customs on community development in Nkanu West and Nkanu East Local Government Areas of Enugu State. The study was carried out with three objectives and three null hypotheses. The research adopted descriptive survey design with a population of 2,125 members of community Based Organizations in the study area. The sample size of 526 persons were selected using random and proportionate sampling techniques. Data for this study was collected with the use of a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was validated by two experts in the field of Adult and Non-Formal Education. Responses to the questionnaire items were analysed with the mean statistics and the hypotheses were tested using the chi square statistics at 0.05 level of significance. The results of the analysed data revealed that traditions and customs of the people of Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGAs have influenced community development both positively and negatively. The people have on some occasions rejected community development programmes that contradict their customs and traditions. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that the government and council of traditional rulers in Enugu State should organize sensitization programmes for community leaders to conscientize them on the need to eradicate certain customs and traditional practices that impede community development efforts in their communities.

Keywords: Tradition, Custom, Community Development

1. Introduction

Every society, group or entity evolved with certain identities or ways of life, which is often referred to as culture. Culture goes with a set standard or code of behaviour which is embedded in the customs, traditions, values and norms of the society; for culture to be truly a complete way of life. This is what one finds in the characteristic of African societies, and a much cherished characteristic; because of its prominent roles in the upliftment of the individuals and the communities. The requirement in the traditional societies is a conduct that promotes the growth and development of the society, as exemplified and interpreted to mean that there is an acceptable code of behaviour every member of the society is expected to exhibit. Any deviation or waywardness is always penalised by ostracizing the culprit and in most grievous cases, it is a death sentence.

Traditions and customs in African societies are orally handed down from one generation to another (Green, 1997). This is what defines a set of people as different from the others. Each group of people has customs that are unique to them. For example, it is common to find among the people of Nkanu West and Nkanu East Local Government Areas of Enugu State, the practice of new yam festival celebration referred to as '*iri ji*' or '*iwa ji*'. The traditions and customs of a people encompass their belief system, settlement pattern, greetings, language, artistic heritage and behaviour pattern. One notable aspect of the customs of Nkanu West, Nkanu East and indeed most communities in Africa is the belief that the community is basically sacred, rather than secular and surrounded by several religious forms and symbols. This accounts for why most Nigerians irrespective of where they reside, whether in urban cities or in the diasporas return home to identify with their communities, especially in times of traditional festivals.

Furthermore, it is worthy of note that some of these traditions and customs, especially those practiced by the people of Nkanu West and Nkanu East Local Government Areas have enhanced and in some cases created bottlenecks in the development of their communities. Since these traditions are perceived to be unalterable, development efforts that do not conform to them are resisted vehemently even when such development are for the common good of all. For example, in December, 2013, Umuigbo-Amurri community in Nkanu West Local

Government Area did not release a particular land requested by Saint Mary Catholic Church Amurri for a Technical School, because they believed the land belongs to a particular deity where they go for traditional healing and worship during new Yam festival. Such believes impede community development programmes.

However, there are other aspects of these traditions and customs that promote community development programmes. Notable among them is the activities of the women's wing of the town, popularly referred to as the "August Meeting". This women's association comes together periodically to deliberate on issues bothering on the welfare of their communities. They identify priority areas of needs in the communities and go ahead to initiate self-help projects that would meet these needs. The men's group and other Community Based Organisations (CBOs) are then informed and collective efforts are made in the implementation of the identified projects. This practice is an age long tradition of the people of Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGA and has enhanced community development efforts in these areas in the past.

It is noteworthy that community development programme is about people's mobilization for action, but people are naturally resistant to change because of the uncertainty of the consequence of such change on them. The situation becomes worse when such change or community development effort does not conform to the people's age long traditions and customs, making people oppose such change and never wanted to be part of such programmes; even when these programmes are imposed on them, they end up abandoning them. For instance, the situating of a community development project in a land regarded as forbidden by the people, or the introduction of birth control programmes in a community where children are culturally and traditionally perceived to be gifts from the gods. The people will naturally resist such programmes as it is the case in Nkanu-West and Nkanu East LGAs.

Some community development projects have been out rightly rejected in these LGAs because they do not conform to the people's custom and tradition and this has slowed down the pace of development in these areas. It stands to reasoning therefore that traditions and customs have lot of influence on community development and must be considered carefully by individuals and agencies who wish to carry out community development programmes. Exposure of such influences of traditions and customs on community development programmes in Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGAs of Enugu State is the problem of this study.

2. Tradition and Custom

As with many other generic terms, there are many definitions of tradition and custom, of which there is no consensus among scholars on the most appropriate definition. The concept includes a number of interrelated ideas; the unifying one being that tradition refers to beliefs, objects or customs performed or believed in the past, originating in it, transmitted through time by being taught by one generation to the next, and are performed or believed in the present Green (1997). According to Shills in Wikipedia (2000), tradition can also refer to beliefs or customs that are prehistoric, with lost or obscure origins, existing from time immemorial. Originally, traditions were passed orally, without the need for a writing system. Tools to aid this process include poetic devices such as rhyme and alliteration. The stories thus preserved are also referred to as tradition, or as part of an oral tradition. Even such traditions, however, are presumed to have originated (been "invented" by humans) at some point.

Traditions are often presumed to be ancient, unalterable, and deeply important, though they may sometimes be much less "natural" than is presumed. It is presumed that at least two transmissions over three generations are required for a practice, belief or object to be seen as traditional. (Gideons, 2003). In the same vein, Green (1999) stressed that some traditions were deliberately invented for one reason or another, often to highlight or enhance the importance of a certain institution. Traditions may also be adapted to suit the needs of the day, and the changes can become accepted as a part of the ancient tradition. Tradition changes slowly, with changes from one generation to the next not being seen as significant. Thus, those carrying out the traditions will not be consciously aware of the change, and even if a tradition undergoes major changes over many generations, it will be seen as unchanged.

Douglas (1984) observed that there are various origins and fields of tradition; they can refer to:

- i. The forms of artistic heritage of a particular culture.
- ii. beliefs or customs instituted and maintained by societies and governments, such as national anthems and national holidays, such as Federal holidays

iii. Beliefs or customs maintained by traditional religious denominations and church bodies that share history, customs, culture, and, to some extent, body of teachings. For example, one can speak of traditional customs, Islamic tradition or Christianity tradition.

Many objects, beliefs and customs can be traditional. Rituals of social interaction can be traditional, with phrases and gestures such as saying "thank you", sending birth announcements, greeting cards, etc. Tradition can also refer to larger concepts practiced by groups (family traditions at Christmas), organizations (company's picnic) or societies, such as the practice of national and public holidays. Some of the oldest traditions include monotheism (three millennia) and citizenship (two millennia). It can also include material objects, such as buildings, works of art or tools.

According to Wikipedia the free encyclopaedia, tradition is often used as an adjective, in contexts such as traditional music, traditional medicine, traditional values and others. In such constructions tradition refers to specific values and materials particular to the discussed context, passed through generations. Green (1997) defines tradition as a belief or behaviour passed down within a group or society with symbolic meaning or special significance with origins in the past. Common examples include holidays or impractical but socially meaningful clothes (like lawyer wigs or military officer spurs), but the idea has also been applied to social norms such as greetings. He further stressed that traditions can persist and evolve for thousands of years—the word "tradition" itself derives from the Latin *tradere* or *traderer* literally meaning to transmit, to hand over, to give for safekeeping. While it is commonly assumed that traditions have ancient history, many traditions have been invented on purpose, whether they be political or cultural, over short periods of time.

3. Community Development

The concept of community development has been defined by different authors and agencies in different ways. Though perceived from different perspectives, there seem to be a consensus among these authors on the fact that there must be people's participation in development programmes that affect them before such programmes can be referred to as community development. According to Adekola (2013), the term community development is a relatively new term in the social sciences and also a relatively new art of practice in the western world. This is because the concept was only introduced in 1948 at the Cambridge summer conference. However, this concept has enjoyed a wide range of definitions ever since.

USICA in Onyeozu (2007) defined community development as a process of social action in which the people of a community organize themselves for planning and action, define their common and individual needs and problems, make group and individual plans to meet these needs and solve their problems, execute these plans with maximum reliance upon community resources and materials resources from government and non-governmental agencies outside the community. Implied in this definition is the fact that community development unlike the conventional development process practiced in Nigeria places emphasis on the people as agents of their own development. They must be involved in the identification of their needs, the planning process, implementation and monitoring of development programmes/projects that affect them.

In the search for a consensus definition for the concept of community development, the United Nations Organization (UNO) in 1963 as stated in Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008:22) presented a definition that today enjoys a wider acceptability. They defined community development as:

A process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities, to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of community, to integrate those communities into the life of the nation and to enable them contribute fully to national progress.

Similarly, Frank and Smith (2013) view community development as a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. It ranges from small initiatives within a small group to large initiatives that involve the broader community. They maintained that effective community development be:

- A long term endeavour
- Well – planned
- Inclusive and equitable
- Holistic and integrated to bigger picture
- Initiated and supported by community members
- Of benefit to the community
- Grounded in experience that leads to best practices.

Alozie (2012) sees “community development as a structured intervention that gives communities control over the conditions that affect their lives.” Anyanwu (1999) said it is “the process of helping a community to strengthen itself and develop towards its full potential”.

3. Brief History of Nkanu West and Nkanu East Local Government Areas of Enugu State

According to Wikipedia (2012), Nkanu-West is one of the Seventeen (17) Local Government Areas of Enugu State and has its headquarters at Agbani. By the 2006 census figures, it has a population of about 146, 695.

There are thirty three (33) towns that make up Nkanu -West local Government Area of Enugu State. In the north, Nkanu-West is bounded by Udi LGA and bounded by Enugu South LGA in the east, and in the West, it is bounded by Agwu LGA. It is equally bounded by Nkanu-East LGA in the south. The people are predominantly farmers. There are two major remarkable seasons in Nkanu-West – the raining season, which enhances fertilization and growth of agricultural activities. Flooding is not frequent in the land or erosion that causes damages in the land. The dry season - this is also very important because it marks the harvesting period.

Onouha (2000) noted that as it is with any other part of the Igboland (Eastern part of Nigeria), Nkanu-West has numerous cultures and traditions that guide both the indigenes and non-indigenes. These traditions like any other existed before the advent of Christianity and they were basically handed down to coming generations orally. When Christianity came in, there were religious and culture crisis in the land. Every effort was made to ensure that people(indigenes) did not stray from the culture. Some of the customs and tradition in Nkanu West as identified by Onouha (200) include the following:

- The practice of gender inequality: it is a common practice among the people of Nkanu-West to forbid women from attending or sitting in the same meeting with the men. It is believed that the man is the head of the house and should represent the interest of all members of his immediate family, that is, the wife and children. If the woman has opinions concerning certain issues of community or family concern, she must air her opinion only to her husband who decides whether or not such opinion is good enough to be discussed among the men in a meeting. It is also believed that since the men usually speak in riddles and proverbs, it is difficult for the women to comprehend such kind of discussions.
- Nkanu-West like most traditional African societies believes strongly in the powers of the ancestors (spirits of the fore fathers). It is believed that these deities have some powers to guide the actions of the people and would punish those who stray from the set standards and norms. The Chief priest known as “Eze Nmo” or “Dibia Nmo” is usually seen as the mouth piece of the gods, therefore his judgments and decrees are seen as sacred and unalterable. Straying from them attracts grave consequences.
- Oral tradition in Nkanu–West has it that some streams in communities in this area cannot be fished on and modern mechanisms cannot be employed in carrying out any form of development programme around those streams. It is believed that if any form of project or fishing is done in those streams, the fishes will be sent away by the noise and the gods will dry up the stream. This explains why it is a common practice in the Igbo custom for elders to offer prayers and say “Ndu-miri, ndu-azu, miri-atana, azu-awana” meaning “the waters should not dry and the fishes shouldn’t die”
- Most remarkable tradition among the people of Nkanu-West is Women Wing Meeting of town unions (Ogbako Umunwanyi), what is popularly referred to as the “Women August Meeting”. The women group which is also the women wing of every town union in Nkanu-West is a very strong organization comprising of women within and outside the community including those in Diaspora. In fact, this organization has different branches scattered all over the country and outside the country. They hold periodic meetings to discuss issues bothering on the welfare and development of their communities. These various branches come together every month of August annually to hold a meeting in the community with the intention of carrying out development programmes in the community. This is what people popularly refer to as “August meeting”. It is usually a very big event so indigent women of these communities within and outside the community come together, harmonize their different plans and projects. After identifying their priority project, they send delegates to inform and seek the approval of the men in their planned project and in some cases solicit their support in executing these projects especially when they are capital intensive. For example, the existing massive Ibute Community hall in Enuagu-Amurri town was initiated by “Nma Nwanyi Bu Di” the women cultural dance group through the process of the “August

Meeting". This tradition which has been in existence for a long time is still upheld in Nkanu-West and undoubtedly promotes community development.(Ogbuife, 2014)

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of tradition and customs on community development in Nkanu West and Nkanu East Local Government Areas of Enugu State. Specifically, the study aimed to:

1. Determine the influence (positive and negative) of traditions and customs of the people on community development programmes in Nkanu West and Nkanu East Local Government Areas of Enugu State.
2. Ascertain the roles of community leaders in upholding traditions and customs for the promotion of community development in Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGAs.
3. Identify the challenges to community development programmes in Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGAs.

4. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in the course of the study at a 0.05 level of significance:

H_01 : Traditions and customs do not significantly influence community development in Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGAs

H_02 : There is no significant relationship between the role of community leaders and measures that can make traditions and customs positively respond to community development programmes in Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGAs.

H_03 : There is no significant relationship between the influence of traditions and customs and the challenges confronting community development in Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGAs

5. Methodology

The design adopted for the study was a descriptive survey. The population of the study was 2,125 members of Community Based Organizations in Nkanu West and Nkanu East Local Government Areas. A sample size of 526 respondents was drawn using a random sampling technique for the selection of eight out of the 13 Community Based Organisations in Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGAs. Proportionate Sampling Technique was then adopted in selecting 40% of the members of each of the eight Community Based Organisations. This gives a total sample of 526 CBO members used for the study.

The instrument used for collection of data in this study was a questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on Influence of Tradition and Custom on Community Development" (QITCCD), divided into six (6) sections based on the research questions and made up of 26 items which were structured on four (4) point Modified Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). This instrument was validated by experts in Community Development and the reliability determined, using the test- re-test method. The responses from the test re-test were analysed and it yielded a correlation index of 0.88. The data for this study were analysed using chi-square.

6. Results Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The results are presented based on the tested hypotheses;

H_01 : Traditions and customs do not significantly influence community development in Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGAs

Table 1: Chi-square Statistics for Hypothesis One

Variables	Statistics Item	Value	X^2_{crit}	P value	Decision
Traditions and Customs	Chi-square X^2_{cal}	26.1	16.92	0.0020	Rejected H_0
Community Development	Degree of Freedom (df)	9			
	Degree of association	0.22			

Data in table 1 showed that the X^2_{cal} was 26.1, while the X^2_{crit} was 16.92 at 0.05 significance level. Since the calculated X^2_{cal} Value (26.1) was greater than the X^2_{crit} table value (16.92) at a 0.05 significance level and 9 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted indicating that there was a significant relationship between Traditions and customs practiced and community development in Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGAs.

H_02 : There is no significant relationship between the role of community leaders and measures that can make traditions and customs positively respond to community development programmes in Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGAs.

Table 2: Chi Square Statistics for Hypothesis Three

Variables	Statistics Item	Value	X ² _{crit}	P _{value}	Decision
Role of community leaders	Chi-square X ² _{cal}	48.09	12.59	0.0000	Ho Rejected
Measures that can make traditions respond positively to community development	Degree of Freedom (df)	6			
	Degree of association	0.29			

Data in table 2 showed that the X²calculated was 48.09 while X²critical was 12.59. Since the calculated X² value (48.09) was greater than the X² critical table value (12.59) at a 0.05 significant level and 6 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted. This implied that there is a significant relationship between the role of community leaders and measures that can make traditions and customs positively respond to community development programmes in Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGAs.

H₀3: There is no significant relationship between the influence of traditions and customs and the challenges confronting community development in Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGAs.

Table 3: Chi Square Statistics for Hypothesis Two

Variables	Statistics Item	Value	X ² _{crit}	P _{value}	Decision
Traditions and Customs	Chi-square X ² _{cal}	29.93	16.92	0.0005	Ho Rejected
Challenges confronting community Development	Degree of Freedom (df)	9			
	Degree of association	0.23			

Data in table 3 revealed that the X²calculated value was 29.93 while the X²critical was 16.92 at a 0.05 significant level. Since the X²calculated (29.93) was greater than the X²critical (16.92) at a 0.05 significance level and 9 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted indicating a significant relationship between the influence of traditions and customs and the challenges confronting community development in Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGAs.

7. Discussion of Findings

The result of the findings revealed that traditions and customs have both positive and negative influence on community development in Nkanu West and Nkanu East Local Government Areas. This is evident in the fact that these people rejects and vehemently resist any community development project/programme that does not conform to their traditions and customs. In fact, the people rejected a particular development project because it was to be sited in a location they consider sacred to their gods. It was revealed however that traditions and customs such as the popular “August Meeting” which involves the women wing of the town union coming together to initiate and execute community development programmes and the leadership pattern of the people of Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGAs have been seen to have positive impact on community development in these places.

This supports Batten in Imhabekhai (2009) where he recounts a story of a change agent that introduced a very light and swifter paddle in a fishing community but the people rejected the new paddle, though better because they believe that the traditional heavier paddle is made from the wood of a tree that gave the people spiritual protection while fishing but the new paddle lacked such spiritual potency.

The analysed data further showed that community leaders play major roles in upholding traditions and customs for the promotion of community development in Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGAs. Community leaders are seen as the custodians and enforcers of the traditions and customs of the people, they can actually persuade the people of their various communities to make compromises on certain traditional practices that impede their development. This is because the people hold these leaders in high esteem. Therefore, if these community leaders are conscientized to relax certain laws and practices that impede their development, they can in turn convince their subjects to do same for the good of the entire community. According to Imhabekhai (2009), the quality of leadership in a community influences the level of development in the community. He stated further that communities have people they look up to for leadership before accepting innovations and for implementing any programme. Since the leaders are members of their communities, they are more likely to be accepted or

listened to or followed than a community development officer who may be a stranger or an outsider to the community.

The result of the findings revealed that some of the major challenges to community development in Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGAs include the people's belief in the supremacy of their deity or gods, their overdependence on the government to provide all their needs, high illiteracy level and widespread poverty. This is line with the assertion of Imhabekhai (2009) that illiteracy makes people conservative and unwilling to accept new ideas. It takes much longer time and effort to convince illiterate people to accept new ideas and for some no matter the degree of persuasion, they may never accept the change or new ideas.

The result of the findings in the hypotheses revealed that all three null hypotheses were rejected and alternative hypotheses accepted indicating that traditions and customs practiced affect community development both positively and negatively, traditions and customs determines people's participation in community development and the role of community leaders affects people's positive response to community development programmes in Nkanu West and Nkanu East respectively.

8. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that the people of Nkanu West and Nkanu East Local Government Areas of Enugu State have some traditions and customs that influence community development. These traditions and customs of the people have influenced community development efforts in Nkanu West and Nkanu East both positively and negatively. The people have on some occasions rejected community development programmes which could potentially improve their lives and communities, simply because of the belief that such programmes contradict their customs and traditions. The study further concluded that traditional leadership structure and the organized practice of the women group popularly referred to as the August Meeting promote community development in these areas. It is also concluded that the people's culture should be put to cognizance when initiating community development programmes.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings and the conclusion therefore, the paper recommends the followings:

- i. External Agencies, the government and the people themselves should carry out mass literacy programmes as a form of community development to increase the literacy level of the people as this would help deal with one of the challenges of community development in Nkanu West and Nkanu East LGAs.
- ii. Government and council of traditional rulers in Enugu State should organize sensitization programmes for community leaders to conscientize them on the need to eradicate certain customs and traditional practices that impede community development efforts in their communities.
- iii. Development Agencies and the people themselves should take advantage of the organized traditional leadership structure and the women organization (August Meeting) to promote community development efforts in these local government areas. These traditional practices should be used to identify and execute community development programmes.
- iv. Since the people of Nkanu West and Nkanu East have a culture that promotes self help and had carried out small scale community development programmes already, the government at state and local levels instead of imposing development programmes/projects on the people should work with them to develop their communities through self help models. The government can provide the necessary technical and financial support but the projects/programme should be identified and executed by the people. This will ensure sustainability of development programmes and efforts.
- v. Agencies supporting community development programmes should involve the people from the onset to ensure such programmes/projects are in line with the people's tradition and custom.

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